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Iran laughs off report Khomeini has cancer

Washington (News Bureau)—Iran today laughed off a White House aide's assertion that Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini is dying of cancer, but the blunder was the second serious Carter administration gaffe during Iran's delicate maneuvers over release of the 52 American hostages.

A spokesman for Khomeini, asked to comment on the allegation by White House congressional liaison chief Frank Moore, said in Tehran: "It's too funny to comment on or deny."

Moore was quoted in yesterday's editions of the Shreveport (La.) Journal as saying that Khomeini had cancer of the colon and was "not going to last long." But United States intelligence analysts said a week-old, full-dress medical diagnosis, prepared at

long-range by CIA specialists, found no sign of cancer in Khomeini.

Moore is one of Carter's oldest associates and a member of his inner circle of Georgians. Although both White House and State Department officials howled over his remarks, based on a raw intelligence report that was contradicted by the CIA analysis, there is little likelihood that he will pay any penalty for it.

MOORE'S STATEMENT followed an inadvertent U.S. warning to Iran earlier this week that any attempt to put the hostages on trial would have "grave consequences." The warning—which came during the Iranian parliament's debate over the fate of the hostages—was a mistake, U.S. officials said.

There is not believed to be much likelihood of spy trials, but when asked to comment on the possibility, State Department spokesman John Trattner gave a reply based on a 10-month-old "guidance." He was supposed to have dodged the question, rather than repeat the old warning to Iran.

Iran has been quick to seize on every U.S. statement—including expressions of U.S. optimism that the hostages might soon be released—as attempts to apply pressure. U.S. analysts believe a majority of Iranian politicians now favor release of the hostages, and so far Iran appears to have shrugged off the two administration gaffes.